

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman

For Immediate Release
2008/288

April 17, 2008

REMARKS

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice

April 17, 2008
Washington, D.C.

(9:04 a.m. EDT)

SECRETARY RICE: Good morning, everyone. I came by just to take a few of your questions, but I'd like to make a few comments first on several issues.

First, the rapid rise in global food prices is an urgent concern. Those who are hit hardest are the poorest people, and, of course, this is a matter of social justice because no one should have to spend all of their daily wages just to buy their daily bread. Rising food prices are a source of social instability, as we are seeing in a number of places around the globe. There are many causes for rising food prices, from fast-growing global demand to devastating droughts to record high fuel costs. But one thing is clear: This is a current emergency but it has long-term global challenges, and the United States is responding accordingly.

In recent years, the United States has consistently provided more than half of all food aid worldwide. We are now taking further steps. The President pledged this week to provide an additional \$200 million to meet unanticipated needs. This is on top of an extra \$350 million for emergency food assistance that we are requesting from Congress in our supplemental.

We are also asking Congress for the authority to provide more of our food assistance through locally purchased agriculture. This will enable the hard-earned dollars of the American people to feed even more hungry people.

In the weeks ahead, we hope to announce an even more -- to announce further steps to help ease the burden of rising food prices on the world's neediest people. Ultimately, though, the world must come together to forge a long-term solution to rising prices of food. We need to encourage farmers and transporters, markets and governments to meet this urgent worldwide challenge. One of the most important steps we can take is to successfully complete the Doha round, which would help to increase agricultural productivity and moderate prices.

It's obviously a busy week in terms of the diplomacy. The President, of course, will meet with Prime Minister Brown today and talk about the whole range of issues that we share with our British colleagues. And then tomorrow, he will meet with the new South Korean President, President Lee. Korea is a strategic ally of the United States, and we look forward to this opportunity to advance our global agenda with Korea's new leadership.

We will, of course, also discuss the Six-Party talks, and I thought I might take a second to give you my assessment of where that process stands. North Korea is disabling its Yongbyon nuclear facility and we are in the second phase of our implementation agreement to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula. The outcome we and our partners require is a full account from North Korea of all its nuclear programs, including any uranium and nuclear proliferation activities.

All six parties have obligations as well, which we've agreed to undertake in parallel with North Korea's submission of a declaration, a declaration that we will verify rigorously. The steps that we are taking are measured ones, and we will continue to judge North Korea's actions and take other steps as warranted.

I want to emphasize that we are at the beginning of a very complex process, not the end -- a process that must lead to the actual removal, for the first time in history, of nuclear material from North Korea and a verifiable end to its nuclear programs. Have we made progress through the Six-Party framework? Yes. Is there still reason for caution and skepticism? Yes. Yet, the Six-Party framework has demonstrated great value. Through it, we have found common ground with China, Japan, Russia and South Korea on denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula and fighting proliferation. The framework is invaluable when North Korea conducted a nuclear test, allowing us to quickly respond at the United Nations. This is much preferable to the United States dealing with these issues alone. Further progress on denuclearization will also enable us to step up our cooperation on other goals: a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula; normalization of relations; a new mechanism to cooperate on peace and security in Northeast Asia; and, of course, an opportunity to improve the lives of the North Korean people. In short, the six-party framework is a framework to elicit cooperation. It is also a framework to deal with noncooperation.

Finally, I leave Saturday for Bahrain and Kuwait, where I will participate in the third Iraq neighbors meeting. This is an opportunity to reinforce the really significant progress that Iraq has made since our meeting last November in Istanbul. Prime Minister Maliki and his government are showing, as they did most recently in Basra, that they will take on any group in their country, no matter what sect, that challenges the rule of law and the legitimate authority of the national government.

Iraqis are turning these security gains into progress on reconciliation. Since the Istanbul meeting, Iraqis have passed key legislation on provincial powers, the amnesty law, de-Baathification and a national budget. This is hard, painstaking work, but it is happening democratically. Iraqis are finding a way to share power and resolve their differences peacefully. Indeed, we see in this recent progress glimpses of what a normal Iraq could be one day, a government of all and for all Iraqis that can meet the needs of its people without external support.

What Iraq now needs most, and what I will push for in Kuwait, is greater support from its neighbors. Iraq's fellow Arab states must fulfill their promises to increase their engagement -- diplomatic, economic, social and cultural -- with Iraq's Government and people. That includes establishing embassies in Baghdad and exchanging ambassadors. Furthermore, Iran must end malign actions that interfere in Iraq's affairs, undermine Iraq's Government, and harm or murder

innocent Iraqis. Ultimately, the stability and success of Iraq is in the interest of all of its neighbors and of the international community, and we will continue to work toward that end.

With that, I'm happy to take your questions.

Anne.

QUESTION: I'm going to ask you about violence in Iraq. You just pointed to Iran, as General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker did frequently in their testimony last week. But just this morning, there was a bombing of a funeral of two of the Awakening Council or Sons of Iraq members, near Baghdad, that has furthered the fear that the Sunni insurgency, the old Sunni insurgency that you used to blame for most of the violence in Iraq, may be reconstituting. How great a concern is sort of the home-grown violence in Iraq at this point? And is it really as large a concern as now what you think is coming over the border from Iran?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, General Petraeus and Ryan Crocker, I think, in -- Ambassador Crocker, in emphasizing the role of Iran, particularly in the south, I don't think intended to suggest that the work against al-Qaida and their insurgent allies is actually done. In fact, we know that al-Qaida is going to continue to try, even from a somewhat weakened position, to pull off spectacular attacks against those who are challenging them, like the Awakening. So I don't think that there is anything new in that, Anne. This is a continuation. But that's why the operations are going not just after the -- those who are supporting the special groups, but they continue to do work against al-Qaida and against the Sunni insurgents, too.

But what has changed is that the context for al-Qaida and the Sunni insurgents, to the degree that they continue to operate, is a far less hospitable context in which their base of operations, Anbar, is overwhelmingly controlled -- cities like Ramadi, Fallujah -- by legitimate Iraqi authorities. And the rebuilding of those cities gives reason to the people of those provinces -- or of those provincial cities to continue to support the government. So the context is fundamentally different than it was when we were standing here talking about this several months ago.

Yeah, Libby.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, I have a few questions on the new U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. Ambassador Crocker said last week that he expects U.S. diplomats to start moving in at the end of May. Is that still your expectation? And when do you expect a complete transfer of all diplomats into the Embassy complex? And I have a follow-up.

SECRETARY RICE: All right. First of all, Ambassador Crocker would be closer to the facts on the ground of how many people he wishes to transfer when. I'm not going to try to micromanage that for the Ambassador. He will work with Pat Kennedy, our Under Secretary for Management, who will be in charge of assuring that we have taken ownership, so to speak, or taken possession, having completed the necessary checks and the necessary inspections to make sure that our people are safe. But I know that Ryan is working on it. We talk about it periodically, but I'm not going to try to micromanage how many people he wishes to transfer when.

My concerns are that the property is properly inspected and ready for our people. There is still considerable work to be done to accommodate everybody, particularly given that we want to co-locate Ambassador Crocker's people with some of General Petraeus's people, and that work has to continue to be done. But to the degree that Ambassador Crocker and Under Secretary Kennedy report to Deputy Secretary Negroponte or to me that they believe we are ready to begin those transfers, I would have no reason to question that.

QUESTION: Do you know the additional costs that it will -- you know, what additional costs will the new housing and office space --

SECRETARY RICE: The original plans for the Embassy are at that 540-plus amount that was originally anticipated. There are other costs that -- I can't give you the exact figures, but it's -- it takes it somewhere slightly north of 700 million, I believe. And that has to do with temporary permanent housing, meaning that we have some additional -- that Embassy was beginning to be planned in 2004, 2005, before the civilian surge took place and before we knew the needs for considerable housing to keep civilians out there. In order -- even though the housing itself is pretty temporary, it requires security measures like cover, air cover, which are expensive. But obviously, we're not going to leave people out there without air cover. As I mentioned, there are also some costs associated with being able to co-locate MNF-I personnel and Embassy personnel. But I think it's -- it needs to be understood that this was a program change which was necessitated by a new strategy in terms of the use of civilians and in terms of our work with the MNF-I, not a classic cost overrun.

QUESTION: If I can get just one more. Indulge me.

SECRETARY RICE: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: I just -- you know, you mentioned that you are trying to convince other states to build embassies in Iraq, or to at least move into Iraq in some capacity. Do you find that it might be hard to convince them, given the size of the new U.S. Embassy in Iraq and the security precautions that you've actually taken?

SECRETARY RICE: We're not asking and the Iraqis are not asking that everybody would mirror the significant effort that the United States has made, I think properly, to show a long-term diplomatic commitment to Iraq. Whatever you think about the decision to overthrow Saddam Hussein or how long military operations will need to last, I don't think anybody is arguing that there shouldn't be a significant diplomatic and economic personnel commitment to this very important country. But not every country is, of course, going to do anything of that scale. And we believe that the conditions increasingly provide an opportunity for Arab -- for Iraq's Arab neighbors to have diplomatic representation there.

Yeah.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, on Zimbabwe, the government is accusing opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai of treason. Now, he -- Tsvangirai is calling for a UN kind of tribunal to deal

with the election crisis. What leverage does the U.S. have to try and forge a solution to this, and is it time for President Mugabe to step down?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, obviously, this is a matter for Zimbabwe as to whether he steps down, but I think he's done more harm to his country than would have been imaginable, if you look at what Zimbabwe was just 15 years ago or so. I know the role that he played in the liberation of Zimbabwe, but the last years have been really an abomination. It's a country that used to feed its neighbors, and now it can't feed itself. And by all of our accounts, those food aid numbers are going to go up dramatically for Zimbabwe. And it's a country that really needs to move on and get on with its future.

Now, I am -- we're very concerned by these statements about "treason" of the opposition and so forth. This was, by all accounts, an election. They need to release the results of that election. The longer they hold those results of the election, the more suspicion grows that something is being plotted and planned by the ruling party. And frankly, the United States and the European Union and others have spoken out about this and we've made calls, but it's time for Africa to step up. Where is the concern from the African Union and from Zimbabwe's neighbors about what is going on in Zimbabwe?

QUESTION: Can I just quickly follow up?

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah.

QUESTION: There have been instances around the world -- in Serbia, in Georgia, in Lebanon -- where the U.S. has made clear to the people of those countries that it would stand by them if they chose to get rid of a dictator or a tyrant that was hurting their country. Has the U.S. made clear enough to Zimbabwe that it will be clear -- it will be there for the Zimbabwean people if they choose to get rid of Mugabe?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I don't want to speculate on what it might mean to be there for the Zimbabwean people. We obviously stand with the Zimbabwean people for carrying out the results of an election, which means that they need to get the results and there needs to be a peaceful transfer of power, if that's what's necessitated. But again, the region also needs to be -- to speak up here. It needs to be engaged. It needs to speak up. I've heard from some, well, outside interference of Western powers. Well, all right, then let the AU and SADC have a voice.

Yeah.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, on North Korea. The full accounting that you're talking about, will this be a public accounting of the uranium program and the proliferation activities? And if this happens to your satisfaction, will North Korea come off the terror list in a quid pro quo in exchange for this declaration?

SECRETARY RICE: We have -- obviously, this is a diplomatic matter, and not everything in diplomacy is public. But we have no desire to hide from anyone the means by which we would account for and then verify. There will be, undoubtedly, briefings for Congress. I don't see any

reason that we shouldn't have a -- that people shouldn't have a sense of what we're going to do -- I -- what we would be expecting to do. I can't tell you that every detail of every diplomatic encounter is going to be a public matter. I think that isn't the nature of diplomacy. But that there can be confidence about what the arrangements would be, I would fully expect that that would be appropriate; that there would be information so that there would be confidence about what the arrangements would be.

In terms of what the United States would do, the lifting of certain sanctions on the North Koreans, steps that could be taken if North Korea actually carries out its obligations, we're going to have to judge whether North Korea has carried out its obligations.

But I will say this: We have a long way to go in terms of all of the various statutory sanctions and multilateral and bilateral sanctions that would remain even if the United States were to take the steps that you outlined.

QUESTION: But on the terror list --

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- I mean, is that a -- are we going to see them come off that terror list?

SECRETARY RICE: John, I'm going to wait until we can understand whether the North Koreans have discharged their obligations in order to -- before we begin to discuss what our obligations are.

QUESTION: Can I follow up?

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, sure. Charlie. Do you mind?

QUESTION: Just to follow up on North Korea and on the -- meeting their obligations and the declaration. This would also include reference to proliferation activities and would mention Syria on North Korea, if that's the case?

SECRETARY RICE: As I've said, there has to be an accounting for all the nuclear programs. All the nuclear programs include not just the uranium program, the plutonium program, but also nuclear proliferation activities. And we've made that very clear, not just to the North Koreans but to other parties in the six-party talks. What the six-party framework gives you is a means by which the United States is not left alone to deal with future pledges that the North Koreans might make or representations that the North Koreans might make about ongoing proliferation activities.

Again, China, Russia, Japan, South Korea -- whenever the North undertakes these obligations, they're undertaking them in the context within the framework of the six-party talks. And I think that's very important, because I can't think of another way that one is going to get a handle on North Korean proliferation activities or deal with the pledges that they make.

Yes.

QUESTION: Did Ambassador Crocker get assurances from the Saudis on Monday in his talks with them that they would sort of lead the way in opening up an embassy and giving more financial assistance to Iraq?

And then secondly, do you intend to meet the Iranians on the sidelines of this meeting or to discuss their actions in Iraq?

SECRETARY RICE: No, I don't intend to meet the Iranians. That's not in the plan.

In terms of -- now let me just say the Iranians will be at the meeting. I'm not trying to suggest they won't be. But no, I don't have any plans to meet them.

In terms of the Saudis, I think you will remember that Prince Saud, some time ago, talked about the fact that they were prepared to send an ambassador back. And we're continuing to await the Saudi naming of an ambassador and then to see what arrangements they can make.

QUESTION: Are you anticipating there may be an announcement at the neighbors meeting?

SECRETARY RICE: No. I think this is a process with Saudi Arabia, as with Bahrain, by the way, which also has made a similar announcement.

QUESTION: In urging the Arabs to have a big diplomatic presence in Baghdad, are you telling them that they will be a big diplomatic counterweight to Iran, and also will you be asking them to help in the reconciliation of Sunnis and Shias (inaudible)?

SECRETARY RICE: I think the Iraqis are doing pretty well, frankly. And -- we've gotten into this language that we use: the reconciliation of Sunnis and Shia. I challenge us to find a place where this is a more open question and where people are actually working harder at it, than in Iraq -- I mean in the region. You know, so look at the status of Shia communities in the region as a whole, and I think the Iraqis are actually trying to go about this in a democratic context.

To the degree that their neighbors can help encourage Sunnis to participate fully in the political process, a democratic political process, I think that is a good thing. To the degree that they can help with reconstruction or humanitarian assistance, that is a good thing. The thing that would most help Iraq right now from its neighbors is debt relief. That's -- really would be the kind of debt relief that the entire Paris Club has already committed to. But as to the Arab states and what I would hope they would pledge to do, it is really to do everything that they can on the three elements that the neighbors conference set up: refugees, security, and borders. I mean, those are places that a lot of help could really be -- could be brought about.

QUESTION: And as a counterweight to Iran?

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, okay. What they need to do is confirm and work for Iraq's Arab identity. Iraq is a founding member of the Arab League, and so Iraq should be fully

reincorporated into the Arab world. I think that, in and of itself, will begin to shield from influences of Iran that are nefarious influences. Iran is a neighbor. It's going to have influence. But Iraq is, first and foremost, an Arab state. It's a state in which Iraqi nationalism is very strong, and the neighbors ought to be reinforcing that.

Yes.

QUESTION: Yes. Secretary Rice, you emphasize the importance for accounting with respect to North Korea. Do you insist on having this specific verification mechanism on not only plutonium, but also on uranium program and the proliferation in North Korea's final declaration?

SECRETARY RICE: The two programs are different, the uranium program and the plutonium program, in that we, obviously, and the IAEA and the international community know a good deal about the plutonium program. And so I think that the verification mechanisms for that will be one set of verification mechanisms, but there have to be means to verify what they're doing. The uranium program is a different matter, with far less knowledge, understanding about what actually happened there and what is actually there. And so it will have to have its own -- will have to have their own means of working through the questions about that program. And the six parties will have to have the -- the other parties will have to have means to work through those thoroughly. I have heard from my other colleagues in the six parties that they, too, are concerned about verification and believe that verification is going to be important.

Now, on -- one of the innovations here on proliferation is that, initially, the six parties did not deal with proliferation, the Six-Party framework did not deal with proliferation. It will now need to deal with proliferation in light of some recent concerns about North Korean activities in proliferation. So each of these problems is different. And since each of the problems is different, you have to look to means of verification that are different.

And let me just -- I think it goes without saying, but perhaps I'd better say it. Verification takes some time because these are complex programs, this is a nontransparent society, there is a history here of surprises. And so it will take some time, even past the second phase, for verification to completely play out. But my point is just because we believe obligations may have been met in the second phase, if there is evidence in -- as we're into the third phase that something was not true that was said in the second phase, you know, there is always the ability and the absolute intention to react to that.

QUESTION: A follow-up on that.

SECRETARY RICE: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Do you have any immediate plans to send your team to North Korea to discuss about the verification issue?

SECRETARY RICE: There will be a team that will go. I don't think we have a date yet, but we've been looking to send an expert team to continue the discussions on verification. And again, I want to emphasize this is a process, that this is not -- that Chris Hill did a very good job

during these recent discussions, but there is much more work to do in order to see whether North Korea is really going to meet its obligations, how over time we are going to be able to verify that those obligations have, indeed, been met.

QUESTION: Does that mean then that you would hold the terror list removal and the other things that North Korea wants out of this out until the verification is actually complete?

SECRETARY RICE: Anne, I think I said that the verification can take some time. What we need to know is that we've got appropriate means for verification. Now, phase two will need to come to an end with both sides having met its obligations. But the process doesn't come to an end at that point. And whatever is done in phase two, if it's demonstrated in phase three that somehow something was wrong in phase two, of course, the United States reserves the right to take whatever steps it needs to, even if we've declared phase two complete.

QUESTION: So just to be -- just to be clear, Madame Secretary, if they provide some kind of declaration that, based on your knowledge, that you feel is complete and you have a verification mechanism that you're satisfied will be able to get you to where you think you need to be in terms of verification, then phase two would be -- and their obligations under phase two --

SECRETARY RICE: I'm not going to make this mechanistic. We are going to judge whether or not we think the North Koreans have discharged their obligations for phase two, and we will then decide whether it is time for the United States to carry out its obligations. But phase two is not a free-standing phase that just ends the process. There is a continuation all the way to the step that I outlined, which is denuclearization, which means nuclear programs are verifiably ended and the material is accounted for and out. So all along that process, we're going to continue to look at whether or not the verification -- or whether -- to verify and continue to look at whether or not North Koreans are meeting their obligations and, indeed, whether they have, indeed, met their obligations in prior phases.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, a clarification.

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah, mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Is Syria an issue in proliferation and why are you -- so far have been reluctant to say so specifically?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, Syria is most certainly an issue in proliferation. We've had troubles and concerns about Syrian proliferation as well. But look, we have several nonproliferation questions on the table about North Korea; we have for some time. What I'm saying to you is that these come now -- it is going to be very important that the proliferation issues also be a part of the Six-Party framework, because to our -- our definition is that that is also a nuclear program, not just what may exist on the soil of North Korea. And that is a position that is shared by the other members of the six parties.

QUESTION: And Syria is a part of (inaudible)?

SECRETARY RICE: End of story.

QUESTION: How about Iran?

SECRETARY RICE: Any country would be. If there is any concern, we have to deal with it in the six-party talks.

Okay.

QUESTION: Thanks.

SECRETARY RICE: All right. Thank you.

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